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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [SI](#)  
SUBJECT: MINISTER OF DEFENSE ON DEPLOYMENTS, ACQUISITIONS,  
AND SPENDING

REF: LJUBLJANA 238

Classified By: Ambassador Yousif B. Ghafari for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Summary:

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¶1. (C) In a June 11 introductory call on Minister of Defense Karl Erjavec, Ambassador Ghafari expressed appreciation for Slovenian Armed Forces support of the June 9 - 10 POTUS visit and for the contributions Slovenia has made to NATO missions in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Erjavec thanked the Ambassador for U.S. military assistance and training and stressed the importance of U.S.-Slovene military relations. The Ambassador urged Erjavec to restructure the Slovenian deployment to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan to provide an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) and to seriously consider U.S. products in any future military acquisitions. The Minister acknowledged the shortfalls in ISAF troop deployments, but indicated that Slovenia is not prepared to change its deployment at this time. Erjavec also noted that he expects Slovenia to meet its NATO defense spending goal of two percent of GDP by 2011 and that the Ministry of Defense will certainly consider U.S. products for future acquisitions. End summary.

Strong U.S.-Slovenian Military Relations

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¶2. (U) In his first meeting with Minister of Defense Erjavec, Ambassador Ghafari recognized the importance of contributions the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) made to the June 10 U.S.-EU Summit and thanked Erjavec for the strong role that Slovenia plays in international missions around the globe. The Minister noted that Slovenia and the U.S. have always had an open and friendly relationship and that our military ties are of particular strategic importance to Slovenia. Erjavec stressed that U.S. military training and financial assistance have been critical to Slovenian military reform.

Change in ISAF Deployment Unlikely

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¶3. (C) The Ambassador repeated calls previously made during a May 29 meeting with PM Janez Jansa (reftel) and in a letter from Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to Minister Erjavec urging Slovenia to consider restructuring its deployment to ISAF to provide an OMLT. The Ambassador suggested that Slovenia could form a joint OMLT with the Colorado National Guard through the ongoing State Partnership Program. Although Erjavec acknowledged that the ISAF mission currently lacks sufficient troops, he stated that Slovenia's deployment had increased from 20 to 71 troops during his tenure and that it is unlikely that the number will increase in the

foreseeable future. (Note: Our sources put the current number of Slovenian troops in Afghanistan at 66, not 71. End note.) Erjavec stressed that Slovenia is more focused on the NATO mission to Kosovo where the SAF currently deploys 363 troops. He suggested that should the situation in Kosovo change and the need for NATO troops decrease, Slovenia might consider contributing more to ISAF.

¶4. (C) Erjavec mentioned that he will attend the NATO Defense Ministerial in Brussels on June 12 and expects to discuss the ISAF mission at length. He stressed the importance of Slovenia serving as a credible NATO partner. Note: MoD U.S. desk officer Stanka Lavrih subsequently told us that Erjavec intends to announce at the ministerial that in January Slovenia will increase from 7 to 10 the number of troops currently participating in an Italian-led OMLT in Herat and will deploy two civilian-military cooperation personnel to the same region in August. End note.

#### Slovenia Still Intends to Purchase Transport Aircraft

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¶5. (U) The Ambassador requested that the MoD consider U.S.-produced aircraft in any future Slovenian purchases of military transport planes. The Minister explained that the MoD had canceled its contract for a Spanish Casa 295 transport aircraft following the crash of a Casa 295 in Poland in January, but intends to reopen the tendering process in the near future. He assured the Ambassador that American planes would be included in the process. Although the Minister could not say when the process would begin, he stated that it would definitely happen as "a military without a transport plane is like a family without a car."

#### Slovenia to Reach 2% Defense Spending Goal by 2011

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¶6. (C) Erjavec provided an unsolicited projection on Slovenia's ability to meet NATO defense spending goals. He stated that a high level of growth in Slovenian GDP had outpaced defense spending and resulted in the current rate of 1.7 percent of GDP on defense. The Minister outlined current defense spending projections, stating that the MoD hopes to spend 1.8 percent of GDP in 2009, 1.9 percent in 2010, and expects to reach 2 percent in 2011.

#### Comment

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¶7. (C) The prospects for Slovenia to provide an OMLT appear dim. We have repeatedly stressed that Slovenia could provide an OMLT without increasing its troop levels by simply restructuring its deployment. Erjavec and others in the GOS seem, however, to be either missing or deliberately ignoring this message and consistently reply that Slovenia cannot increase its troop levels at this time. Slovenia is planning Parliamentary elections for early fall and those results are likely to affect the government's calculus about its activities in Afghanistan. Should there be a change in political will on this issue, there are indications that a joint operation between the SAF and the Colorado National Guard would be feasible. At the June 2 - 5 National Guard State Partnership Program Regional Workshop in Sofia, Slovene and Colorado National Guard representatives agreed that they could carry out a joint operation, provided the decision is made by the political leadership. We have informed the MoD that Slovenian troops could receive OMLT training at the Joint Multinational Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany. End comment.

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